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Mob violence at Singhu, massing of farmers at Ghazipur; Shah trip off

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

A day after the police tried to evict farmers from Ghazipur, action on Friday shifted to the Singhu border — the nerve centre of the ongoing protests against the three farm laws — where a group of 'locals' clashed with agitators demanding they vacate the place.

The Delhi Police and security personnel resorted to lathicharge and launched tear gas shells to control the situation as both sides resorted to stoning and the mob allegedly snatched batons from security forces to attack the protestors.

The clashes began after more than 100 locals reached the site with placards and the Tricolour around 1.15 pm and shouted slogans like *Jai Shri Ram, Goli Maaro Salon Ko, Desh Ke Ghaddaron ko, Khalisthan Khali Karo.*

They allegedly damaged tents and other paraphernalia of farmers, which led to retaliation. In the melee, Delhi Police SHO (Alipur) Pradeep Paliwal was injured as a man allegedly attacked him with a sword.

"These people carrying national flags came with stones and *lathis* and asked us (farmers) to vacate the highway. After heated exchange of words, they attacked our tents, pelted us with stones and hit us with lathis," said Harinder Singh Lakhowal, general secretary of BKU (Lakhowal).

The police arrested 43 people in connection with the day's clashes, including farmer Ranjeet Singh (22) for attacking the SHO. A common FIR charging them with attempt to murder, damaging public property, attacking public servant on duty, etc., has been registered.

In contrast, the UP-Delhi border at Ghazipur was peaceful, but the crowd swelled in the morning following an emotional appeal by Rakesh Tikait, national spokesperson of Bharatiya Kisan Union. Farmers, in batches, small business owners, and social and political activists visited the protest site in droves. The camps of protesters now span a distance of 6 km on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway. Similarly, farmers in large numbers on their tractor-trailers from Punjab and Haryana are moving back towards Singhu and Tikri borders.

With the situation still evolving, Union Home Minister Amit Shah cancelled his proposed weekend trip to West Bengal.

Earlier in the day, a mahapanchayat of farmers in Muzaffarnagar decided to throw weight behind the BKU. The GIC ground near Mahaveer Chowk, where the meeting took place, was jampacked. The mahapanchayat was called by BKU national president Naresh Tikait after the Ghazipur developments.

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Ajit Singh has already announced his support to the BKU and his son Jayant Chaudhary met Tikait at Ghazipur.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police sent notices through WhatsApp messenger app to nine farmer leaders to join the investigation in connection with the violence at Red Fort on January 26.

Police personnel pin down a farmer (top), who allegedly attacked police Station House Officer (Alipur) Pradeep Paliwal, during clashes between locals and farmers at the Singhu Border in Delhi on Friday; and a man hurls a stone at protesters at Singhu as policemen look on | PTI

We don't need lecture on respecting national flag from these people. Majority of farmers who are sitting here have their children fighting at the border for the country

Yudhvir Singh, farmer leader

PRESIDENT DEFENDS NEW FARM LAWS

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday defended the contentious farm laws in his address to Parliament and described the recent Republic Day violence as unfortunate. With the laws put in abeyance on the Supreme Court's orders, Kovind said the government will abide by the verdict of the highest court of the nation. While he addressed a range of issues, including the tension on the China border, the biggest focus of his speech was on the agriculture sector | P9

Demand to withdraw FIRs against journos

With the police in Noida, Bengaluru and Madhya Pradesh filing FIRs against MP Sashi Tharoor and journalists Rajdeep Sardesai, Mrinal Pande, Zafar Agha, Paresh Nath, Anant Nath and Vinod Jose for misleading tweets/retweets over the Republic Day violence, media bodies, including the Editor's Guild, demanded their withdrawal, saying it was an attempt to browbeat and intimidate the media. The FIRs were booked under 10 provisions, including the sedition law P7,10

High alert after blast outside Israeli Embassy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

A low intensity blast occurred on the high-security posh Abdul Kalam Road near the Israel Embassy on Friday evening at a time when the annual Beating Retreat ceremony was under way at Vijay Chowk near Rashtrapati Bhavan, sending security officials into a tizzy. President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the three Service Chiefs were attending the ceremony just a few km away from the blast site.

While no injury or casualty was reported, three cars parked nearby on the opposite side of the carriageway suffered minor damage.

Friday also happened to mark the 29th anniversary of India and Israel establishing full diplomatic relations back in 1992.

While the officials in the security establishment said the blast was being investigated as an attempted 'security attack', Delhi Police called it a 'mischievous' attempt to create a sensation. P5,10

Delhi police after cordoning off the area outside the Israeli Embassy where the bomb exploded | PARVEEN NEGI

EXPRESS READ

3 militants killed in encounter in Pulwama

Srinagar: Three militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in J&K's Pulwama district on Friday, police said. The encounter broke out after militants opened fire at the security forces, who retaliated. P10

Vax campaign: UN calls on India to play vital role

New Delhi: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said India's vaccine manufacturing capacity is one of the best assets the world has today. He hoped India will have all instruments necessary to play a major role in ensuring global vaccination. P10

SURVEY SEES V-REBOUND, GROWTH @ 11%

JAYANTA ROY CHOWDHURY @ New Delhi

INDIA is likely to grow by 11% in the next financial year (FY22), the annual Economic Survey tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on Friday said, predicting a V-shaped recovery from the sharp 7.7% economic contraction in this pandemic-hit year. "With the economy's return to normalcy brought closer by the initiation of a mega vaccination drive, hopes of a robust recovery in services sector, consumption, and investment have been rekindled," said the Survey. However, it cautioned it would take at least two years to get back to the pre-pandemic levels.

The Survey, an annual exercise in economic stocktaking and future policy prescriptions, drew lessons from the pandemic to strongly recommend raising healthcare spending from 1% to 2.5-3% of GDP.

Dr Krishnamurthy Subramanian

It indicated that the government would overshoot its fiscal deficit target by a wide mark and may look at increased spending and stimulus measures in the year ahead to push growth. Former member of the PM's Economic Advisory Council and Chief Economist with Brickwork ratings Dr M Govinda Rao said: "Relaxation in fiscal deficit targets may be necessary, and the government may have to revise the target upwards for the current year in view of the need to augment capital expenditures."

While analysts at Barclays say the fiscal deficit has widened to 7.7% of GDP, Darren Aw, Asia Economist at Capital Economics, calculated it at 8%. This is against a target of 3.5% set in this year's Budget. Chief Economic Advisor Dr K Subramanian said: "Reforms must go on to enable India to realise its potential growth and erase the adverse impact of the pandemic." Analysts predict a spate of state-run enterprise privatisations and asset sales in the budget to help fund infrastructure spending the government is likely to have planned. P13

THE KEY TAKEAWAYS

Rising from down under
GDP to replicate V-shaped performance of Indian cricket team in Australia to scale historic heights after a poor start

IT boom continues
Norms relaxation enable IT-BPM companies to "Work from Home" to post growth

Bollywood's Bare Necessity link
Tinsel town's rhetoric on "Roti, Kapda Aur Makan" (Food, clothing and housing) mirrors socio-economic issues of country

More teeth to redress system
Current ombudsman set up is only advisory in nature, rendering it ineffective

Power point
India's Transmission & Distribution losses are over **20 Per cent** of generation, twice the world average

Saved 1 lakh lives
Strong lockdown measures helped restrict cases by 37 lakh, save 1 lakh lives

Women empowerment
Promote non-discriminatory practices like pay and career progression to increase female participation rate

Agriculture as modern biz
Bats for urgent reforms to transform farming into modern business enterprise

Upskilling children
Vocational courses for skill development of students from classes 9 to 12

Online education a great leveler
Online schooling can reduce inequalities in educational outcomes if well-utilised

Focus on R&D, Jugaad can take you only so far

THE FINDINGS

Companies contribute much lesser to the country's gross expenditure on R&D (37%) when compared to businesses in each of the Top 10 economies (68% on average)

In terms of R&D workforce, the Economic Survey said the govt sector contributes the highest share of total R&D personnel (36%) and researchers (23%) amongst Top 10 economies (50% on average)

BISMAH MALIK @ Bengaluru

THE Economic Survey-2021, released on Friday, sounded critical of Indian firms' expenditures on Research and Development (R&D) saying that "mere reliance on Jugaad innovation can risk the country missing crucial opportunities". On the brighter side, India improved its ranking on the Global Innovation Index (GII), entering the list of world's top 50 innovating countries, ranked at 48.

When it came to competing with the top 10 global economies, especially China, India lagged much behind on the basis of seven pillars of GII including knowledge and technology outputs (KTO-27th rank) market sophistication (31), business sophistication(55), human capital and research (HCR-60) institutions (61) creative output (64) and infrastructure (75).

"India must significantly ramp up investment in R&D if it is to achieve its aspiration of emerging as the third largest economy in terms of GDP (current US dollars). Mere reliance on "Jugaad innovation" risks missing the crucial opportunity to innovate our way into the future. This requires a major thrust on R&D by the business sector," the Survey stated.

The Economic Survey blamed the country's business sector's lesser contribution for India's dismal gross expenditure on R&D(0.65% of GDP) , much lower than that of the top 10 economies (1.5-3 % of GDP).

Neighbouring China, as per the Survey, had targeted its gross expenditure on R&D as part of GDP to touch 2.5% in 2020.

SCREEN SHOT

MLC caught in row over 'video clip' in House

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

CONGRESS member of the Legislative Council and former Ranji cricketer **Prakash Rathod** found himself in the eye of a storm on Friday after a vernacular television channel claimed that he was watching a 'sleazy video clip' inside the House. In a video doing the rounds, the lawmaker can be seen scrolling through the gallery on his mobile phone.

When contacted, Prakash Rathod explained that he had listed a question (No. 7 on the agenda), which is sent to members on their computers or mobile phones. "I was checking for the download on my mobile phone when I noticed that the device was clogged and hence, I was scrolling and deleting some content to clear phone memory. This is when the TV channel took the visuals and has been mischievously claiming that I was watching porn inside the House," he said. P4

School tuition fee cut by 30 pc, nothing else to be paid

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

PARENTS of students studying in schools under the state board, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) boards will pay only the tuition fee for the year 2020-21, that too 30 per cent lesser than the previous year, Primary and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar said on Friday.

No other fees — like term fee, school development fee or under any other head — can be charged by the schools, the minister announced. Parents who have to pay up pending fees should be given the choice of paying in two to three instalments, he said, adding that schools had not run for six months, but teachers had to be paid salaries, and hence this arrangement. Any school wanting to charge a lesser fee is welcome to do so, and in cases where parents have already paid excess fees, it can be adjusted for the next academic year.

Suresh Kumar told reporters that all the stakeholders had been consulted. While on the one hand, paying fees was difficult for parents, on the other, paying salaries to school staff had emerged as a major problem for school managements in face of the Covid-19 pandemic-related circumstances.

S R Umashankar, Principal Secretary, Department of Primary & Secondary Education, said, "Tuition fee also includes salaries paid to staff and others like library fee. There are several other fees beside tuition fee — for instance school development fee, donations to trusts that run the school, transport fee and other extracurricular fee — all of which have been scrapped since those services had not been provided. Online education has been given, but no extra amount can be charged for it, and the tuition fee will cover online education."

To deal with the differences of opinion between parents and administrators regarding the fee issue, Kumar said state-level and district-level committees, empowered to oversee the process, are being constituted. P2

PU II EXAMINATIONS FROM MAY 24

The PU II examinations will be held from May 24 to June 10, Primary and Secondary Education Minister Suresh Kumar announced on Friday. The minister also announced a tentative time-table for the exams. P2

Panel blames Horatti, BJP members for Council fracas

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

AN interim report of the House Committee, constituted by Legislative Council chairman Pratapchandra Shetty to probe the unruly scenes on the floor of the House of December 15, has indicted JDS MLC **Basavaraj Horatti**, who is tipped to be elected chairman of the House, and Pranesh M K, who was appointed Deputy Chairman only on Friday.

The committee's report also has blamed Deputy Chief Minister Dr C N Ashwath Narayan and then Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister J C Madhuswamy for the fracas.

The committee has based its findings on complaints from marshals, CCTV camera footage from the House and other visual evidence brought on record.

The final report of the panel will be submitted after a week. P6

NUTTY ROW

Areca a narco nut! What was government chewing, ask lawmakers

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

WHAT"S a hearty meal without a juicy paan-beeda to top it off? And what's a paan-beeda without betelnuts? You'd be surprised to know that arecanut, a major cash crop, was listed as a narcotic substance by the government on one of its online portals.

The government's war on narcotic drugs may have received appreciation from many, including lawmakers, but its move to put arecanut, also considered a sacred offering in Hindu culture, under the narcotics category, certainly did not go down well with legislators. In fact, it angered them so much that they took the government to task and forced it to immediately correct its folly.

Just when areca growers in the state were hoping to get a good price for their produce, they were shocked to see it had been listed in the narcotics category on the 'Krishi Marata Vahini', an online agricultural marketing information system that gives information about various commodities in the state.

Sources in Krishi Vahini said they had taken it from a Government of India website,

translated it and uploaded it on the website. Minutes after the issue was discussed in the Assembly, it was taken off the website.

The government may have been quick to make amends, but it had already ruffled feathers. On Friday, legislators demanded action against those responsible for such a blunder that hurt areca growers' sentiments and also resulted in a sudden drop in prices.

Initiating the debate on the issue in the Assembly, BJP MLA Hartal Halappa said they were aghast to know that areca was placed under the narcotics category, that too on a government website. The legislators sought to know who took such a decision and why. "Such a move has resulted in a drop in areca prices in Shivamogga market," he said. P7